REPORT ON THE REGIONAL MEETING OF THE EPISCOPAL WOMEN'S CAUCUS

The first regional meeting of the newly-constituted Episcopal Women's Caucus met at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria on April 21-23. About forty members viewed a film strip, took part in workshops and group discussions, and planned strategy for introducing women to positions of greater responsibility within the Episcopal Church. As with the women's movement in general, the main emphasis was two-fold: to encourage in women the confidence to seek a more substantial role in all levels of church leadership, and to devise ways of promoting the idea that many women are fully qualified to function professionally in the Church on an equal basis with the men. The consensus of opinion among these women, many of whom had been serving the Church for more than twenty years, was that they were tired of being confined to pouring coffee, teaching children, and sewing for bazaars.

Most of the women taking part in the regional meeting were from the Dioceses of Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia. Pennsylvania had a strong contingent with a total of four Dioceses in that state represented. Other representation included such states as Florida and New Hampshire. The three organizers of the meeting, Pat Park, Betty Rosenberg and Jane Shoemaker are students at Virginia Seminary. The Reverend Suzanne Hiatt, who served as consultant, works for a

consortium of Episcopal theological schools - Philadelphia, General in New York, and the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Sue Hiatt is a visiting lecturer at Philadelphia teaching conventional subjects, currently Homiletics, and also organizing special courses in women's studies.

The first meeting of the Episcopal Women's Caucus was held October 29 and 30, 1971. Originally this conference, funded by the Board of Theological Education, was intended for women seminarian students, graduates, postulants, deacons and those formerly referred to as deaconnesses, but the strong, favorable response of lay women at the conference immediately broadened both the base of the movement and its goals. Nevertheless, women's ordination became the prime focus of discussion. Without an organized program, the October group was pulled together by the fact that the House of Bishops had just recently again referred the subject of women's ordination to further study. This move was followed by San Francisco Bishop, Kilmer Meyers' statement which, by mentioning the passivity of women and their rightful subordination to men, was understandably objectionable to those assembled. The women duly constituted themselves a Caucus, a deliberately chosen word emphasizing their basically political orientation. The Caucus then issued a strongly worded statement of their own to the Presiding Bishop objecting to further study, refusing to take part in further study, and calling for immediate action by the Bishops and Diocesan Conventions. Finally,

members of the Caucus called for regional meetings to be held in the spring of 1972.

The broadening base of the movement was readily discernable in the composition of the group attending the regional meeting in April, 1972. The average age of the participants was well over forty. Many women members of the Episcopal Church Women (ECW), including board members, were present. More than 85% of the group were not seeking ordination but simply more responsible positions in the Church. Their goals included membership on vestries, in Diocesan Councils, Diocesan Conventions, on Diocesan Boards, and in the General Convention as lay deputies. There were housewives, students, volunteer workers, and several women engaged professionally in full-time counseling. All of them were dedicated to the principle and spirit of lay ministries as being essential to the revitalization of the Church.

The regional meeting began Friday, April 21, with introductions and a slide show on the past and current status of women in the Church. Assembled from such dissimilar materials as advertising slogans, words from favorite hymns, quotes from Genesis and Martin Luther, and prayers written specifically for women, the slides and narration were designed to reveal the insidious nature and effects of discrimination against women in the Judeo-Christian tradition, especially in the Church. Afterwards the women broke into discussion

groups where they told of their own experiences and how those experiences related to what was shown in the film.

The next day, beginning at 9:00 a.m., the women took part in four workshops: Ordination, Mass Media and Communications, Structural and Political Processes, and How to Educate. After lunch, each workshop gave its report to the whole group. In every case the double focus of the report was first on defining the problem, then recommending strategic means for overcoming it.

In the Ordination workshop for instance, a history of the action or non-action by those in authority over the question of women's ordination was reviewed. A brochure distributed to all members of the Caucus included: a partial list of theological studies already done on the question, the action of the House of Deputies taken at the General Convention of 1970, a Statement and Resolution of the Anglican Consultative Council (whose Resolution 28b permitted an Anglican Bishop to ordain two women Priests in Hong-Kong), and the Bishop's Charge, a sermon given in the Hong-Kong & Macao Diocese at the event of the women's ordination. The Bishop's Charge dealt in part with the difficult question as to whether the priesthood is to be considered primarily as functioning to represent the whole of humanity before God, or primarily as a priestly caste, a semi-mystical brotherhood.

The Ordination workshop then suggested that the women keep an eye on New York where the issue has been fully joined by both sides.

The ECW of New York had succeeded in passing through Diocesan Council a resolution that the question of women's ordination be memorialized (i.e., put on the agenda) at the 1973 General Convention in Louisville. This resolution must next be passed by the Diocesan Convention of New York which meets in May, 1972. In the meantime, however, fifty priests from that Diocese have submitted a counter-resolution that women not be ordained on the basis of the fact that it would split the Church, meaning that many of those clergy with a high Anglican persuasion would leave the church. In response to this counter-resolution the Canon of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine preached a sermon calling for the ordination of women because it is basically a moral issue which must be dealt with now.

As for strategy, the Ordination workshop was generally, though not unanimously, agreed that a low-key approach, particularly toward the House of Bishops' meeting in the fall of 1972, was desirable as those Bishops somewhat open toward ordination of women have asked for trust in the matter. Three male students from Wesley (Methodist) Seminary in Washington, D.C. who were observing the Caucus proceedings as part of an academic study, brought out that key factors in the question may now be job competition, plus the principle that no group in control will voluntarily relinquish power. However, instead of the often abusive militancy advocated by some women's groups, the Caucus strategy calls for increased cooperation with the

ECW and a quiet personal approach to delegates of Diocesan Conventions.

The Communications and Mass Media workshop, vis a vis ordination, suggested that women postulants, candidates and seminarians be explicit and articulate on why they want to be ordained. They pointed to the need of having able, well-informed spokesmen at the Diocesan Councils, and of having a regional level, public relations person who could act as liaison with local newspapers, TV and radio. They also advocated seeking publicity, perhaps by sponsoring a newsworthy event. The question of just how aggressive one should be generated a lengthy and spirited discussion. Finally, an internal newsletter mailed nationwide to all members of the Caucus was thought a good idea.

From Structural and Political Processes came ten blocks to advancement of women in the Church at all levels. In no particular order they included the attitude of society in general, turning people off by being too aggressive, inadequate feelings of confidence in the women themselves. Also mentioned as blocks were husbands, clergy and Anglo-Catholic or high Anglican theology. In a general discussion on this point some women denied the assertion that ordained women priests would necessarily prevent the future union of Anglican and Roman Churches. It was felt that the issue may not be that much more disruptive than married priests or Papal infallibility. In any case, the eventual <u>form</u> of union may serve to mediate between non-negotiable concerns on each side.

A final block to advancement lies within the attitude of some women who, having attained a degree of power in the Church, become jealous of it and proud, thereby contributing to a feeling of resentment in their co-workers. Not all women desire greater authority within the Church or approve of the goals of the Caucus, so that solidarity as women and fellow members of Christ, and sensitivity in all dealings with each other must be emphasized as going beyond political expediency or political goals. In short, an essentially political campaign for power or responsibility must not lead to a hierarchy of value in jobs, so that those fully content with the more traditional roles of women in the Church can remain assured that their contribution to our Lord and His Church is as valid, meaningful and welcome as any other contribution. Again, lay ministry surfaced as the common bond between those more politically oriented and those more socially oriented. Whatever the scope of their individual goals, all are committed by Christ to ministry of one sort or another.

The fourth workshop on How to Educate expressed many of the concerns dealt with by other groups. Defining what this kind of education was trying to accomplish, they chose increasing awareness of the changing role of women, helping both older and younger women see their own, future possibilities in the Church, and questioning traditional roles and stereotypes. Listed among ways to implement

these educational goals was an item stressing the importance of working with young people, for the search for meaningful roles in society is endemic, intense and often despairing within our youth; and of course the search for meaning and responsibility is not confined to one sex. The other recommendations on how to educate seemed all to be grounded in personal ministry and concern rather on the techniques of propaganda, so that by the end of the afternoon the fully representative nature of the Caucus could again be seen in the unpremeditated, basic balance achieved in the reports from the workshops. The first two groups, Ordination and Mass Media, exhibited a political thrust and savvy, while the last two showed a more generalized, pastoral concern with relationships between women and women, women and men, clergy and laity, society and young people. At five o'clock wine and cheese were served, followed by a scattering abroad to local restaurants. As a scheduled meeting of groups by Diocese had already taken place in the late afternoon, a final evening session considered the future of the Episcopal Women's Caucus. By 10:30 p.m., all those not staying at the Seminary until morning said goodnight and went home - some to young families, some to jobs, some to widowhood and grandchildren, some to studies. All will come back together again when they can. Women in the Church is a "problem" that is not going to go away.

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